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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the benefits of using the newspaper in reading classes for high school special education students. Students in one of two classes received two trimesters of instruction in basic reading skills through use of the newspaper. Students in the other class received one trimester of instruction in developmental reading and writing activities and were also instructed about newspaper parts and organization. Analysis of the results of pretests and posttests indicated that gains in reading achievement occurred for both groups; gains in knowledge of newspaper parts were noted only for the group that received special instruction about newspaper parts; and attitudes of both groups toward newspapers and subjects treated in newspapers were improved through the program. (GW)

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An Investigation to Determine the Effectiveness of Using the Newspaper to Teach Reading to Secondary Special Education Students*

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An Investigation To Determine The Effectiveness Of Using The Newspaper To Teach Reading To Secondary Special Education Students

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Introduction

Hundreds of newspapers throughout the United States are offering schools and teachers such services as study guides, lesson plans, workshops, demonstration teaching, reduced-rate newspapers, and consultant services--most designed to assist teachers to teach various subject areas using the newspaper as a resource. Enthusiastic teachers involved in such programs frequently describe successful experiences in using the newspaper as classroom instructional material for teenagers who read below grade level. Such teachers typically state that they know newspapers capture students' interest, and that they believe that their use results in gains in reading achievement. It was the investigators' receipt of information from a high school special education reading teacher that led to involvement in the study reported here, the purpose of which was to examine the effectivess of newspaper use for improving the reading of high school special education students.

A teacher reported that instruction in three high school special education reading classes had been centered around the use of the newspaper for about two months at the beginning of the 1975-76 school year. All groups received instruction in newspaper organization, and each group engaged in reading activities designed especially for it. Students were tested using the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). Pre-post test differences of up to four months were noted for students who had the greatest reading difficulties. This abrupt change for students whose WRAT scores had remained unchanged over the previous

year or two led the teacher to request help from the investigators in validating her results.

Related Literature

A number of articles suggesting using newspapers to teach reading to students with severe reading problems have appeared in professional literature. Four authors writing separately suggested use of the newspaper as motivation for reading--Cheyney (1971), Maskovsky (1973), Odom (1971), and Johnson (1969). In addition, Johnson suggested using it for increasing readiness, content, vocabulary, and comprehension; Whisler (1972) advocated its use in the teaching of study skills; and Potter (1975) recommended using it to teach vocabulary. Cheyney advocated the use of newspapers to teach vocabulary, word attack, comprehension, analytical and critical reading skills. In addition he suggested its use to teach the various developmental reading skills. Seaman (1970) reported using recipes from the daily newspaper to teach pronunciation and comprehension.

In an ERIC/RCS report published in the Journal of Reading, Barth (1975) reviewed a few of the many materials published by newspapers to assist teachers in using the newspaper to teach reading. The investigators' survey, of professional literature however, revealed just four reports of studies examining the results of newspaper use.

Charles Berryman (1971) examined the use of newspapers with students in grades four through seven, ninety percent of whom were reading below grade level. Following fifty consecutive classes using the newspaper, students' scores showed significant gain in general reading skills. Many students increased reading skill as much in ten weeks as is normally done in one year. Teachers estimated student interest to be

as high or higher than under normal circumstances, yet newspapers did not interest every student. Teachers, however, expressed high levels of concern over using newspapers rather than the traditional content.

Maskovsky (1972) reported a study involving high school seniors in Leland, Mississippi, who were reading below grade level--many at the fifth and sixth grade levels. Following eight weeks of reading periods (45 minutes of reading and 15 minutes of discussing what was read) utilizing only newspapers as instructional material, comprehension scores were at eleventh and twelfth grade levels for all students.

Wardell (1973) reported the development and evaluation of a program for teaching reading using newspapers. Its purpose was to increase students' ability to locate specific information and to distinguish between facts and opinions, major ideas and minor details, and favorable and unfavorable statements in the newspaper. She reported that such skills were increased using the developed materials with newspapers. Of the 2200 students involved in the study, those who seemed to benefit most were students with high intelligence and low socioeconomic level and students with low intelligence and high socioeconomic level.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the newspaper as the sole instructional material for improving the reading achievement of high school special education students in these classes. This evaluation of the third trimester reading program (March-May, 1976) was designed to answer three questions:

(1) Will use of the newspaper as sole instructional material result in significant gains in reading achievement?

(2) Will use of the newspaper result in significant gains in knowledge of

newspaper parts, whether or not this is a part of instruction? and (3) Will use of the newspaper result in change of teenagers' attitudes regarding topics of interest found in newspaper stories?

Procedures

Students enrolled in two reading classes were evaluated. Group A consisted of students whose reading levels ranged from 1.8 to 3.5 at the beginning of the second trimester (WRAT, December 15, 1975) and who participated in the program during the second and third trimesters. Instruction for Group A consisted of work on basic reading skills. No instruction was given in newspaper parts or organization. Group B consisted of students whose reading levels ranged from 6.1 to 13.7 at the beginning of the third trimester (WRAT, February 24, 1976) and who participated in the program during the third trimester only. Instruction for Group B consisted of developmental reading and writing activities. Instruction in newspaper parts and organization was given.

Newspapers were provided by the Houston Post Educational Services. All instruction was carried out by the reading teacher. Test construction and testing was done by pre-service English teachers enrolled in a secondary reading class taught by one of the investigators at the University of Houston, College of Education.

To determine whether gains in reading achievement would be noted, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) was used as pre-and post assessment. This test was chosen solely because it was already in use in the school and previous scores for many students (including those in Group A) were available.

To determine how much students were learning about the newspaper, and to determine whether students were changing their attitudes about the

newspaper and its contents, two instruments were designed. The first was a 25 item "Knowledge of the Newspaper Test," consisting of sample newspaper parts and their names. Students were required to name the parts in multiple choice or matching items. The second instrument was an affective response questionnaire requiring six semantic differential responses to each of ten subjects of interest to teenagers and common to newspaper items. This instrument was intended to measure any changes in student attitude toward newspapers and newspaper subjects.

Pre-assessment on all instruments was conducted on February 3-4, 1976. Tests were scored and results evaluated in the following manner. Gains in reading achievement as measured by the WRAT and gains in newspaper knowledge as measured by the "Knowledge of Newspaper Test" were tested using the t-test for related measures (Bruning and Kintz, 1968). Changes in attitude as measured by the affective response questionnaire were determined by examination of mean numbers of responses in each category.

Results

Gains in reading achievement were noted for both groups. The gains for Group A were significant ($t = 3.968$, $p < .005$) while the gains for Group B were not ($t = 1.983$).

(insert table 1 about here)

Gains in knowledge of newspaper parts were noted only for Group B. This was expected since Group A had not received instruction in newspaper parts.

(insert table 2 about here)

It should be noted that the two groups differed on both pre-and post assessments in knowledge of newspaper parts. Group A students had been working with the newspaper during the second trimester, Group B students

Table 1

Pre-Test And Post Test Scores On Wide Range Achievement Test

	Group A			Group B	
S	Pretest	Posttest	S	Pretest	Posttest
1	3.6	4.4	1	8.4	8.7
2	3.6	4.1	2	6.8	9.0
3	3.1	3.3	3	9.0	9.3
4	1.9	2.5	4	6.7	7.0
5	3.0	5.0	5	13.7	13.7
6	4.1	4.8	6	9.3	10.1
7	3.5	5.4		$\bar{X}$ = 8.98	$\bar{X}$ = 9.63
8	2.4	3.3		t = 1.98 (not significant)	
9	4.8	5.2			
	$\bar{X}$ = 3.33	$\bar{X}$ = 4.22			
	t = 3.97 ($p < .005$)				

Table 2

Pre-Test And Post Test Scores On

Knowledge Of Newspaper Parts Test

S	Pretest	Posttest
1	15	16
2	14	21
3	19	19
4	16	6
5	15	16
6	19	12
7	18	20
8	20	14
9	12	22
	$\bar{X}$ = 16.44	$\bar{X}$ = 16.22
	t = - 1 (n.s.)	

S	Pretest	Posttest
1	2	25
2	8	24
3	6	25
4	5	25
5	1	25
6	6	25
	$\bar{X}$ = 4.67	$\bar{X}$ = 24.83
	t = 5.33 (p < .005)	

had not. It is possible that their exposure to the newspaper accounts for their better performance on the pre-assessment and that the absence of instruction on newspaper parts *per se* accounts for their lack of gain during the third trimester. Group B, which did receive instruction in newspaper parts, went from almost no correct responses on the pre-assessment to almost entirely correct responses on the post assessment. It appears that instruction in newspaper parts results in knowledge of those parts, and that exposure to newspapers results in some, but not adequate, knowledge of newspaper parts.

Attitudinal changes as a result of the program were more difficult to evaluate. It had been hoped that use of the newspaper would cause students to become more definite in their attitudes toward certain subjects thought to be of interest to teenagers and known to be treated frequently in newspapers.

Responses of students to the four-point semantic differential scales are presented in Table 3. Pre- and post test means are given for Group A and Group B respondents on each of the ten items surveyed.

(Table 3 about here)

A few comments concerning the responses are in order. In three cases (politics, newspapers, want ads) the mean responses were more positive after the program than before. The fact that newspapers and want ads were among these is considered encouraging. Attitudes toward politics may have become more positive due to the lively discussions which arose in both groups during presidential primaries. In two cases (teenagers problems, comic strips) little change was seen in responses. This may be due to the fact that students' attitudes toward these subjects were well set before the program began. Interestingly, the only item on which attitudes of both groups became less positive was teenagers' problems.

Table 3

Mean Responses Of Group A and Group B

Students To Affective Response

Questionnaire

	Pretest (N = 11)	Posttest (N = 9)	Pretest (N = 8)	Posttest (N = 5)
Politics	2.61	3.15	2.23	2.57
Astrocast	2.89	2.65	2.63	2.83
Sports	3.41	3.52	3.31	2.97
Teenagers Problems	2.42	2.31	2.33	2.21
Comic Strips	3.55	3.52	3.00	3.03
Newspaper	2.85	3.65	3.00	3.60
Famous People	2.23	3.24	3.42	2.57
Adventure	3.50	3.35	2.79	3.33
Want Ads	3.12	3.44	3.10	3.30
Crime	2.41	2.24	2.10	2.37

N.B.: Four response categories were possible on each of the six semantic differential scales for each item.

Perhaps the program opened students to broader horizons. In five cases (astrocast, sports, famous people, adventure, crime) differences were in opposite directions. It would be difficult at best to explain these changes, except to suggest that differences in students or in specific group activities might account for them.

Conclusions and Discussion

Three conclusions have been reached as a result of the study.

1) Gains in reading achievement for high school special education students can occur with a newspaper instructional program, especially when the students are extremely poor readers and when instruction in basic reading skills is given.
2) Gains in knowledge of newspaper parts for high school special education students can occur with or without specific instruction; however, greater gains occur with instruction.
3) Attitudes of high school special education students toward newspapers and newspaper related subjects (e.g. politcs) can be improved through a newspaper instructional program.

The most important conclusion of this study is the first one. The special education students who took part of the program had poor records of success in reading. They had made little or no gain in reading in several years. The significant gains of Group A students particularly is evidence of the value of the newspaper as instructional material. The newspaper offered them a relevant and success building curriculum which could carry over into their lives outside of school. This, coupled with the third conclusion, that attitudes toward newspapers and newspaper topics could be changed in a positive direction, was gratifying to the reading teacher and to school administrators who plan to continue and enlarge the program in the 1976-77 school year.

Recommendations

The investigators make the following two recommendations:

1) A more controlled study should be made of reading achievement gains in newspaper instructional programs. More exact measures of reading, newspaper knowledge, and attitude should be used.

2) Similar studies should be conducted with groups other than special education students. Possible benefits of a newspaper instructional program for remedial readers, college bound students, vocational students, etc., should be explored.

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